

Lesson Three: Love's Extravagance

Unlock with Questions:

1. What is your most valuable possession?
2. What is the best part about being in love?
3. What is the biggest sacrifice someone has made for you? Or, what is the biggest sacrifice you've made for someone?
4. What is the costliest gift anyone has ever given you?
5. Do you care about Jesus' opinion of you more than you do about others' opinions of you?

Unlock New Thoughts: John 12:1-8

We have jumped to the end of Jesus' public ministry. The first part of the gospel has been a whirlwind of events and character sketches from Jesus' public ministry, and from this point forward, we enter the passion week. John spends about 40% of his gospel on the week of the crucifixion and resurrection, knowing that it is central to the good news of Jesus.

The anointing at Bethany, as this story is known, is the first event of the passion week. The talk about Jesus is bubbling up to a frenzy as we begin this story.

Lazarus has been raised from the dead. He doesn't go into hiding after regaining his life—he is living life out in the open, in the public eye. Everyone had four days to hear about Lazarus' death, and now they see him out walking around again. Those Pharisees and chief priests are infuriated.

In Jerusalem the chief priests and the Pharisees were plotting to kill Jesus but two miles away in Bethany, Jesus' friends were throwing him a dinner party. The dinner party takes place at the home of Simon the Leper, Matthew and Mark tell us. He was undoubtedly a famous leper in Bethany whom Jesus had healed and would have been well known to Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

Mary

Mary's act of devotion was costly. The perfume was derived from pure nard which is an aromatic herb grown in the high pastures of the Himalayas, between Tibet and India. And it was pure...not a substitute.

It was an unusual act for two reasons: normally oil was poured over a person's head, not their feet. And Mary used her own hair to wipe Jesus' feet. A respectable woman would not have let her hair down in public.

Mary shows humility in caring for Jesus' feet, a servant's task. Matthew and Mark record her anointing Jesus' head, so we can assume she anointed both his head, body, and feet. 1 pound or 12 ounces of oil is a lot of oil. She empties the jar onto Jesus.

Mary's act shows an intense personal devotion to Christ. This perfume would have been bought from India and was very expensive. People speculate why she had it. Some say she was saving it for her own burial. Some say it was her dowry. I don't think we can really know because there isn't any indication in scripture what its original purpose was. All we know is that Mary was overcome with love for Jesus that she ran and grabbed her most precious possession and poured it out over Jesus.

Was she impetuous? Was she a rash decision maker? Judas (and the other disciples) thought she was.

Or was she motivated by love and devotion? Think back to the time you fell in love. Was there anything you wouldn't do for your beloved? Remember at the beginning the days of sleepy haze because you just couldn't say goodbye to each other the night before. Remember the thrill of serving and meeting the needs of the other person.

Mary recognizes and perhaps senses and understands what is about to happen to Jesus. It's female intuition. Jesus tells us she is anointing his body for burial ahead of time. She knows. She understands what she's doing. Jesus had been telling the disciples all the way on the journey to Bethany (and ultimately Jerusalem) what was coming. But only Mary understood it.

The odor permeates the house. It spreads.

Think about it this way...the disciples are writing about this story long after it happened. What they remembered was not the presence of Lazarus, so much, or the bravery of Jesus' friends for throwing him a dinner party. It was Mary's extravagant gift of love.

Are you extravagant in your love for Jesus? You can be sure that he will not fault you for that. He will not accuse you of bad judgment, waste, or foolishness.

Judas

The irony of John 11:57 is that Judas, sitting at the dinner party table, is the one who turns Jesus in. He betrays Jesus for silver and in a matter of a couple minutes has estimated the cost of the jar and perfume.

His complaints reveal his true nature. The contrast between the generosity of Mary and the selfishness of Judas is striking here. John is writing this long after the event and is given insight into who Judas really was. He was an embezzler, a thief. I wonder what our words say about us? They are saying something.

Judas was obviously persuasive because his complaints persuaded the others to chime in. We know this from Matthew 26:8 and Mark 14:4. Wherever Mary looked she met angry glances, looks of shocked disapproval. Only one person comes to her defense. Only one person champions her.

Out of Judas' greed he sold out Jesus for 70 pieces of silver. That's worth about 120 denarii. Mary's gift was worth two and a half times that amount. So the question holds, could you and would you give your most valued possession to Jesus?

Jesus champions her. What would my life be different if I knew and really believed Jesus would stick up for me and defend me? Would I take more risks for him? Would I have bolder conversations with my neighbors and fellow PTA moms?

Jesus says in Matthew and Mark's account of the story that Mary will be remembered for all time because her exorbitant, lavish love. Don't we want to leave a lasting legacy? Then love well, sisters. Share yourself. Give yourself away.

Unlock the Scriptures:

Read these stories of sacrificial giving and love. Jesus often calls us to give exponentially more of ourselves or our resources than seems comfortable, or even possible. What do you learn from these examples given to us in Scripture? What were the attitudes of the characters in the stories?

Genesis 22:1–18

1 Samuel 1:1–11

Acts 4:32–35

Hosea 1:2–3; 3:1–3

Luke 21:1–4

1 Samuel 20:12–17

2 Samuel 11:6–17

Lock It In: John 12:24–26

We live in a time that is conscious of the value of life. And we have many devices for saving life. We have lifeguards, life preservers, seat belts, even life insurance. We have world class medicine to heal our bodies from disease. I wouldn't be standing here if not for those life saving advances.

Lazarus is the physical picture of these verses and Mary recognizes this. Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days, Martha tells us in her oh so pragmatic way.

John 11:25—I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. Spoken to Martha right before raising Lazarus from the dead.

Why should we listen to this advice? Why not just disregard it and go on collecting our stuff and seeking the thrills of life? Because we have Jesus as an example.

Phillipians 2:6-11

Let's look closer at verse 25. In the English language we miss a nuance of the verse. In the original Greek, there are two different words used for LIFE. The first reads whoever loves his life, loses it. Here the Greek is psuche, from which we derive the word psyche. Our psyche is the life of our minds. Our egos. Our personhood.

It's the human personality which thinks, plans for the future, and charts our life paths. Jesus is saying that our psyche must die. In other words my independent will must die so that I can actively submit to Christ's will for me.

The second word for life is Zoe and when it's joined with the adjective for eternal, means the divine life. Every Christian has this eternal or divine life now, but she

has it in its fullness only when her entire personality with all of her likes and desires is surrendered to Christ.

George Mueller when asked about the secret of his effective service to Christ's ministry said, "there was a day when I died—died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame of my brethren or friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God."

To lose your own life in order that you might gain eternal life means that you must be willing to do anything for Christ, if he directs it. And you will be in for a wild ride. And Jesus gives us a couple promises as incentive and encouragement to die to ourselves.

Look what he says...he will be with anyone who follows him. And he will honor the person who follows him, who dies to herself. Just like Mary was honored and championed and defended.

Charles Spurgeon gave an example in one of his sermons to illustrate this point. The prince and his servant.

Lock It Down:

Take three minutes to complete a contemplative exercise with me. Imagine yourself in Mary's place in this story. What do you hear as you're eating, as you're anointing Jesus' feet, as Jesus defends you? What do you smell? What do you taste? What do you see around you? How do you feel as you leave the room and retrieve the perfume? Play the scene out like a movie in your mind with you as the main character.

Know that Jesus receives our gifts and sacrifices and honors them.

Bonus Features: More Resources; Conversation Starters at the Table or in the Car

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Go back to a time in your life when you fell in love and remember the emotions, the way you treated one another, the sacrifices you made for one another. Journal about that time and then consider how you might fall more in love with Jesus.